

over, but not so with our Tax Code. Folks, when you look at the American economy, there is nothing that is going on with the American economy that we did not do to ourselves. Think about that. Mr. Speaker, do you have any constituents back home who have lost their jobs to corporations that have moved overseas? I do. And yet we continue to have the highest corporate tax rate in the world in America. Now who decides that? We do. We decide that's the kind of country we want to live in, and we can change it. Folks, there is nothing wrong with America that we collectively can't fix.

Now I've introduced a bill that I believe is going to make a dramatic impact in that direction. It's called the Fair Tax. It's H.R. 25 in the House, it's S. 13 in the Senate. And Mr. Speaker, as you know, it is the most broadly cosponsored piece of tax reform legislation in either body. In fact, it is the most widely cosponsored piece of legislation on tax reform in both bodies. And what the Fair Tax does is this—it's no magic solution, Mr. Speaker; it doesn't have some sort of clever math that's going to make everything okay. It simply goes into the American Tax Code and erases it. It says, if you could start with a blank sheet of paper, what would you do?

And Mr. Speaker, we can. We can start with a blank sheet of paper. We can choose our own destiny. We can make sure that we're making the best decisions for jobs and the economy in this country. The Fair Tax does this. It will eliminate the income tax code, that income tax code that punishes people for what they earn, and it changes that Tax Code with a Tax Code that collects taxes based on what people spend.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, it pains me every time I open up *The Wall Street Journal* and it bemoans the fact that American consumerism is in decline. Why can't we celebrate American savings? Why do we have to celebrate American consumption? The reason is because we have been building an economy based on an income tax code that is based on debt and refinancing and debt and refinancing, but we can change that today, Mr. Speaker. We have 1 billion new consumers coming online in China, 1 billion new consumers coming online in India, and they want what we produce.

The Fair Tax erases the income tax code that forces American productivity overseas, forces American jobs overseas, and it returns us to our roots as a country, our roots as a country that reward productivity, that encourage folks to stay.

□ 1020

There is only one taxpayer in this country. I know we have a corporate income tax. I know we have taxes on goods and services and excise taxes, and on and on and on. But there is only one taxpayer in the American economy, and that is the American con-

sumer, because every single tax we have rolls downhill.

Do you want to charge that corporation tax? Do you want to charge Wal-Mart an excise tax? What do you think is going to happen at Wal-Mart? Prices are going to go up. Do you want to charge Coke a sugar tax? What do you think is going to happen to the price of your Coke? The price of Coke is going to go up. There is one taxpayer in this country, the American consumer.

That is a radical idea, I won't kid you. And by radical I mean it is the same one Thomas Jefferson had. By radical I mean it is the same one Alexander Hamilton had. By radical I mean we haven't done it in the last 100 years. But we can do it today, Mr. Speaker, with H.R. 25 and S. 13.

CHANGE COURSE NOW IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. McGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, last night the President outlined his strategy for Afghanistan, which included a drawdown of 10,000 troops by the end of this year and an additional 23,000 by the end of next year. I believe this is insufficient and I fear that it means more of the same for the next 18 months. The same strategy means the same costs, and I am sad to say even more casualties, more American soldiers losing their lives in support of an Afghan government that is terribly corrupt and incompetent.

We have been doing this for 10 years. It is the longest war in our history, Mr. Speaker. Enough. Our focus should be on encouraging a negotiated settlement, a political solution, and bringing our troops home where they belong. Our troops are incredible men and women. I am in awe of their dedication and their commitment. They don't belong in the middle of mountains and deserts fighting a cruel war.

According to the Pentagon's own figures, U.S. and coalition casualties in Afghanistan are steadily rising. Last month was a record high for the number of coalition forces killed. March and April were also the worst respective months of the war in terms of casualties for U.S. forces, coalition forces, and Afghan civilians.

A poll last month by the International Council on Security and Development found that Afghans are overwhelmingly opposed to the current U.S. strategy, with nearly eight in 10 believing that U.S. and coalition operations are "bad for their country." These are serious matters, serious consequences of the strategy the U.S. pursue at least through next year.

We need a change in direction now, Mr. Speaker, not 18 months from now. We are borrowing nearly \$10 billion a month to pay for military operations in Afghanistan. Borrowing. We are not paying for it. We are putting it on our

national credit card. Our kids and our grandkids will pay the price. Each day we remain in Afghanistan increases that burden.

We currently are having debates about how to reduce our deficit and debts. There are some who have advocated deep cuts in programs that help the poor, in Pell Grants, and in infrastructure. For those who support the status quo in Afghanistan, let me ask, where is the sense in borrowing money to build a bridge or a school in Afghanistan that later gets blown up, while telling our cities and towns that we have no money to help them with their needs? It is nuts. Some of our biggest problems, Mr. Speaker, are not halfway around the world. They are halfway down the block.

Americans are willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure our national security, but let me remind my colleagues that national security includes economic security. It means jobs. It means rather than nation-building in a far-off land, we need to do some more nation-building right here at home.

Contrary to the tired and ugly rhetoric employed by Senator MCCAIN yesterday towards thoughtful critics of our current strategy in Afghanistan and its consequences, I am not an isolationist. As my colleagues know, I firmly support human rights and the U.S. being engaged around the world. Those who advocate a political solution in Afghanistan are not isolationists.

I don't believe we should walk away from the Afghan people, but tens of thousands of U.S. boots on the ground in Afghanistan does little in my view to advance the cause of peace, protect the rights of women and ethnic minorities or strengthen civil society. If you want to protect Afghan women, we must end the violence. You end the violence by ending the war. You end the war through a political solution.

I have great respect for President Obama. I believe he has the potential to be a great President. I also realize, as Lyndon Johnson once said, "It's easy to get into war—hard as hell to get out of one." It is not easy to end this war. It won't be neat or pretty, but I believe with all my heart it is in our national security interest to focus on al Qaeda and not waste our precious blood and treasure in a conflict that can only be ended through a political solution.

Rather than crafting a compromise and trying to chart a middle course, I believe we need to change course. I urge the President of the United States to rethink our Afghan policy, rethink it in a way that brings our troops home sooner rather than later.

[From the Washington Post, June 9, 2011]

A PLAN FOR AFGHANISTAN: DECLARE VICTORY—AND LEAVE

(By Eugene Robinson)

Slender threads of hope are nice but do not constitute a plan. Nor do they justify continuing to pour American lives and resources into the bottomless pit of Afghanistan.

Ryan Crocker, the veteran diplomat nominated by President Obama to be the next U.S. ambassador in Kabul, gave a realistic assessment of the war in testimony Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Here I'm using "realistic" as a synonym for "bleak."

Making progress is hard, Crocker said, but "not impossible."

Not impossible.

What on earth are we doing? We have more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan risking life and limb, at a cost of \$10 billion a month, to pursue ill-defined goals whose achievement can be imagined, but just barely?

The hawks tell us that now, more than ever, we must stay the course—that finally, after Obama nearly tripled U.S. troop levels, we are winning. I want to be fair to this argument, so let me quote Crocker's explanation at length:

"What we've seen with the additional forces and the effort to carry the fight into enemy strongholds is, I think, tangible progress in security on the ground in the south and the west. This has to transition—and again, we're seeing a transition of seven provinces and districts to Afghan control—to sustainable Afghan control. So I think you can already see what we're trying to do—in province by province, district by district, establish the conditions where the Afghan government can take over and hold ground."

Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.), a Vietnam veteran and former secretary of the Navy, pointed out the obvious flaw in this province-by-province strategy. "International terrorism—and guerrilla warfare in general—is intrinsically mobile," he said. "So securing one particular area . . . doesn't necessarily guarantee that you have reduced the capability of those kinds of forces. They are mobile; they move."

It would require far more than 100,000 U.S. troops to securely occupy the entire country. As Webb pointed out, this means we can end up "playing whack-a-mole" as the enemy pops back up in areas that have already been pacified.

If our intention, as Crocker said, is to leave behind "governance that is good enough to ensure that the country doesn't degenerate back into a safe haven for al-Qaeda," then there are two possibilities: Either we'll never cross the goal line, or we already have.

According to NATO's timetable, Afghan forces are supposed to be in charge of the whole country by the end of 2014. Will the deeply corrupt, frustratingly erratic Afghan government be "good enough" three years from now? Will Afghan society have banished the poverty, illiteracy and distrust of central authority that inevitably sap legitimacy from any regime in Kabul? Will the Afghan military, whatever its capabilities, blindly pursue U.S. objectives? Or will the country's civilian and military leaders determine their self-interest and act accordingly?

Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued a report this week warning that the nearly \$19 billion in foreign aid given to Afghanistan during the past decade may, in the end, have little impact. "The unintended consequences of pumping large amounts of money into a war zone cannot be underestimated," the report states.

The fact is that in 2014 there will be no guarantees. Perhaps we will believe it incrementally less likely that the Taliban could regain power and invite al-Qaeda back. But that small increment of security does not justify the blood and treasure that we will expend between now and then.

I take a different view. We should declare victory and leave.

We wanted to depose the Taliban regime, and we did. We wanted to install a new gov-

ernment that answers to its constituents at the polls, and we did. We wanted to smash al-Qaeda's infrastructure of training camps and havens, and we did. We wanted to kill or capture Osama bin Laden, and we did.

Even so, say the hawks, we have to stay in Afghanistan because of the dangerous instability across the border in nuclear-armed Pakistan. But does anyone believe the war in Afghanistan has made Pakistan more stable? Perhaps it is useful to have a U.S. military presence in the region. This could be accomplished, however, with a lot fewer than 100,000 troops—and they wouldn't be scattered across the Afghan countryside, engaged in a dubious attempt at nation-building.

The threat from Afghanistan is gone. Bring the troops home.

[From the Washington Post]

TIME TO GET OUT OF AFGHANISTAN

(By George F. Will)

"Yesterday," reads the e-mail from Allen, a Marine in Afghanistan, "I gave blood because a Marine, while out on patrol, stepped on a [mine's] pressure plate and lost both legs." Then "another Marine with a bullet wound to the head was brought in. Both Marines died this morning."

"I'm sorry about the drama," writes Allen, an enthusiastic infantryman willing to die "so that each of you may grow old." He says: "I put everything in God's hands." And: "Semper Paratus."

Allen and others of America's finest are also in Washington's hands. This city should keep faith with them by rapidly reversing the trajectory of America's involvement in Afghanistan, where, says the Dutch commander of coalition forces in a southern province, walking through the region is "like walking through the Old Testament."

U.S. strategy—protecting the population—is increasingly troop-intensive while Americans are increasingly impatient about "deteriorating" (says Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) conditions. The war already is nearly 50 percent longer than the combined U.S. involvements in two world wars, and NATO assistance is reluctant and often risible.

The U.S. strategy is "clear, hold and build." Clear? Taliban forces can evaporate and then return, confident that U.S. forces will forever be too few to hold gains. Hence nation-building would be impossible even if we knew how, and even if Afghanistan were not the second-worst place to try: The Brookings Institution ranks Somalia as the only nation with a weaker state.

Military historian Max Hastings says Kabul controls only about a third of the country—"control" is an elastic concept—and "our" Afghans may prove no more viable than were "our" Vietnamese, the Saigon regime." Just 4,000 Marines are contesting control of Helmand province, which is the size of West Virginia. The New York Times reports a Helmand official saying he has only "police officers who steal and a small group of Afghan soldiers who say they are here for 'vacation.'" Afghanistan's \$23 billion gross domestic product is the size of Boise's. Counterinsurgency doctrine teaches, not very helpfully, that development depends on security, and that security depends on development. Three-quarters of Afghanistan's poppy production for opium comes from Helmand. In what should be called Operation Sisyphus, U.S. officials are urging farmers to grow other crops. Endive, perhaps?

Even though violence exploded across Iraq after, and partly because of, three elections, Afghanistan's recent elections were called "crucial." To what? They came, they went, they altered no fundamentals, all of which

mitigate against American "success," whatever that might mean. Creation of an effective central government? Afghanistan has never had one. U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry hopes for a "renewal of trust" of the Afghan people in the government, but the Economist describes President Hamid Karzai's government—his vice presidential running mate is a drug trafficker—as so "inept, corrupt and predatory" that people sometimes yearn for restoration of the warlords, "who were less venal and less brutal than Mr. Karzai's lot."

Mullen speaks of combating Afghanistan's "culture of poverty." But that took decades in just a few square miles of the South Bronx. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, thinks jobs programs and local government services might entice many "accidental guerrillas" to leave the Taliban. But before launching New Deal 2.0 in Afghanistan, the Obama administration should ask itself: If U.S. forces are there to prevent reestablishment of al-Qaeda bases—evidently there are none now—must there be nation-building invasions of Somalia, Yemen and other sovereignty vacuums?

U.S. forces are being increased by 21,000, to 68,000, bringing the coalition total to 110,000. About 9,000 are from Britain, where support for the war is waning. Counterinsurgency theory concerning the time and the ratio of forces required to protect the population indicates that, nationwide, Afghanistan would need hundreds of thousands of coalition troops, perhaps for a decade or more. That is inconceivable.

So, instead, forces should be substantially reduced to serve a comprehensively revised policy: America should do only what can be done from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, airstrikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the porous 1,500-mile border with Pakistan, a nation that actually matters.

Genius, said de Gaulle, recalling Bismarck's decision to halt German forces short of Paris in 1870, sometimes consists of knowing when to stop. Genius is not required to recognize that in Afghanistan, when means now, before more American valor, such as Allen's, is squandered.

AMERICAN ANGELS ABROAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we have a group of people in the United States who are all volunteers that I call the American Angels Abroad. They are those thousands of Peace Corps volunteers throughout the world that are helping Third World countries in many different ways. They go to remote areas of the world, far from home, far from their families. They work in very primitive conditions. Yet there are those angels that are trying to help other people throughout the world, and they are called the Peace Corps volunteers.

The Peace Corps started as an idea of President Kennedy back in 1960 when he spoke to the University of Michigan and encouraged those students to volunteer to help America abroad. Finally, in 1961 he started the Peace Corps. Since then, over 200,000 Americans, mainly young people, mainly females, have volunteered to go around the world representing the United States.